

San Jacinto River Waste Pits, Texas

Site Update – May 2011

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Contact: Cynthia Fanning, Congressional Liaison
214-665-2142 or fanning.cynthia@epa.gov



BACKGROUND:

The site consists of impoundments located adjacent to the Interstate Highway 10 (I-10) Bridge and the San Jacinto River and the surrounding areas, containing paper mill waste from the Pasadena Champion Paper Mill. Two impoundments are located north of the I-10 Bridge and are partially submerged in the San Jacinto River on the western side in Harris County, Texas. An additional impoundment is suspected to be located directly south of the I-10 Bridge and is currently being investigated under the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study.

The primary hazardous substances documented at the site are dioxins (polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans). Dioxin concentrations as high as 360,000 parts per trillion have been found in sediment samples collected from the submerged portion of the waste disposal ponds, as well as dioxin concentrations as high as 3,660 parts per trillion in sediment samples collected outside the original 1966 waste ponds. A fish consumption advisory based on dioxin is in place on this segment of the watershed.

The site was listed on the EPA National Priorities List on March 19, 2008. More information about the site is available at <http://www.epa.gov/earth1r6/6sf/pdf/files/0606611.pdf>.

STATUS OF CURRENT ACTIVITIES:

I. Community Outreach

On May 12, 2011, EPA, in cooperation with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), Harris County, and other Federal and State agencies, conducted a Community Engagement Meeting for the SJRWP site in Highlands, Texas, to seek input from the public and to provide information about the Time Critical Removal Action (TCRA) underway and other health and cleanup issues.

II. Source Stabilization

Respondents continue land placement of armor cap rock on top of Western waste pit cell. As of June 14, total rock placed (armor cap type A, B/C, C, and D) was 51,602 tons, which is 83% of the entire project. More information about the TCRA is available at www.epaossc.org/SanJacWPremoval. Armor cap placement is anticipated to be complete within the next 4 weeks, pending final inspections and survey results.

III. Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS)

All the six Field Sampling Plans of the Fate & Transport Model Study have been approved. The Respondents are currently implementing these fate and transport plans, including the collection of Sedflume, upstream sediment load, and current velocity data. The Sedflume data collection effort was completed; however the upstream sediment load and current velocity data are still being collected as outlined in the respective field sampling plans. A draft residential soil sampling plan was submitted by Respondents and is currently undergoing regulatory review. The residential sampling includes collection of soil samples from both the east and west sides of the San Jacinto River near the Site for dioxin analysis. Finally, the validated soil sampling data for the southern impoundments was received and is currently being reviewed to identify the next steps. The EPA SJRWP website with public information on the RI/FS, TCRA, and Houston/Galveston Bay Watershed and can be found online at: http://www.epa.gov/region6/6sf/texas/san_jacinto.

IV. Watershed Management

EPA continues to coordinate with the Port of Houston Authority (POHA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Galveston District (USACE-GD) and the TCEQ. The POHA and EPA will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement to facilitate the exchange of data to further investigate the situation and will inform communities in the area. Offsite samples will be collected by EPA with the coordination of the POHA. TCEQ envisions completing the total maximum daily load for Buffalo Bayou with regard to dioxin/furan by the end of 2012 and will put together a monitoring and implementation plan to reduce levels in Buffalo Bayou to within national background levels.

V. Enforcement

The potentially responsible party (PRP) group is conducting the RI/FS under the Unilateral Administrative Order. The PRP group is conducting the TCRA under an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC). Currently, the PRP group is in violation with the AOC for not performing work in accordance with the December 17, 2010, EPA approved Work Schedule. The PRP group is in the process of coming into compliance with the AOC.